

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 986

CS 008 634

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TITLE Young Adult Literature in Developmental Reading Classes.
PUB DATE Nov 85
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Regional Conference of the International Reading Association (11th, Nashville, TN, November 2-5, 1985).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescent Literature; Cognitive Development; Curriculum Enrichment; *Literature Appreciation; Paperback Books; Reader Response; Reading Comprehension; *Reading Instruction; Reading Skills; Reading Strategies; Remedial Reading; Secondary Education

ABSTRACT

One of the most effective means of achieving a successful program in reading is the use of the young adult novel to stimulate the adolescent's interest in free reading or even to instill an interest where there is none. A novel which provides pleasurable reading experiences with interesting material at the proper level (such as novels by Judy Blume, S. E. Hinton, and Robert Cormier) can serve as a bridge to adult literature and can increase adolescents' confidence while strengthening their ability to deal with literary concepts. A plan to develop reading skills should consist of a one-semester course divided into units of five and three weeks. After the first five-week unit the students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of a study system as well as an understanding of the meaning of words and word parts. After the first three-week unit the student should begin to be able to use the young adult novel to apply previously learned concepts and skills. The second five-week unit should enable the students to demonstrate an understanding of basic reading skills, and the second three-week unit should enable them to use the young adult novel to apply all previously learned concepts and skills. (NKA)

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YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE IN DEVELOPMENTAL READING CLASSES

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YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE IN DEVELOPMENTAL READING CLASSES

I. Rationale

During the earliest part of a student's formal education, great emphasis is placed on reading. Students are encouraged to read books both in and outside of the school setting. As students pass into middle school and junior high school, less attention is paid to free reading, except for the usually hated book report. High school often concludes with reading a work by Shakespeare or Hugo.

During the process of education, students may become totally disenchanted with reading or may no longer consider reading as a FUN avocation. As teachers, we may do students a disservice by not trying to make them cognizant of the joys of being readers for life which enable them to realize the wonderful things they can experience and learn through the medium of print.

As educators, we know how important it is for students, or anyone else, to be lifelong readers. Nonreaders are deprived of so many benefits and pleasures which readers gain from the books they read. An article in Media and Methods by Terry Ley (1979) cites the following frightening statistics from a survey by the National Opinion Research Center:

1. Citizens of the US read fewer books than citizens of Great Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries
2. Approximately 10% of our population reads approximately 80% of the books read
3. About half the adult population of the US has never read a book all the way through
4. Less than 1 out of 5 adults could name a book they would like to read (p. 22)

In Books and the Teen-Age Reader , Robert Carlsen (1980) defines adolescence as the stage in a person's life which ranges from 12 to 20 years of age. According to Carlsen, reading declines during the period of middle adolescence. A partial cause of this decline is that schools force upon these students literature which is too mature for them; thus, students begin to rebel and reject reading of any kind. Carlsen continues to say that another cause for this decline in reading is brought about as a result of students' increased involvement in the world around them. He believes that young adults with only moderate or few reading skills will continue to read if they can be reinforced by conditions such as:

1. Being surrounded by reading materials which are within their range of reading interests
2. Being able to read in a supportive, nonthreatening situation
3. Being given the time to read
4. Being allowed to share their reading experiences
5. Being given access to readily available reading material (p. 6)

In Literature for Today's Young Adults (2nd edition) by Alleen Nilsen and Ken Donelson, the authors refer to headlines prevalent in today's printed mediums decrying stories that teens cannot read and that test scores are falling. "The 1980 National Assessment of Educational Progress found that the ability of high school students to read and comprehend on a literal or basic level was 'fairly well under control, higher order skills are not'" (Nilsen, 1985, p. 3). These authors propose that part of the solution lies in educators' ability to get students to read during their leisure and the educators' ability to guide teens to books which are entertaining yet are a challenge to their ability or cause them to analyze and evaluate the ideas or things which happened in the book.

Susan Nugent discussed in an article published in the November 1984 issue of the English Journal several ways in which young adult (YA) literature can benefit a school's curriculum. YA literature can serve as a bridge to adult literature. Adult literature may have vocabulary, concepts, or syntax which are too difficult for students at their present level. YA literature can supply positive reading experiences for students which will increase their confidence while strengthening their ability before they go to more mature reading; thus, these students are better able to deal with the more difficult vocabulary, concepts and syntax.

This type of literature may be used to teach or review difficult literary concepts such as symbolism or the use of the internal monologue. The familiar content found in YA literature allows students to focus on the concept itself instead of being faced with the dual job of dealing with difficult concepts and material.

YA literature can expand the student's experience with various types of literature. This genre usually requires less reading time and allows for a quicker involvement in the story; thus, students are provided with a chance to read a wider variety and types of literature.

A major value of this type of literature occurs as the result of the reader's ability to explore experiences through vicarious means. For example, the readers of A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich (Alice Childress) appreciate the complexity of emotions within an individual as well as the pressures of society upon that same individual. YA literature can help students study and understand other people and enable them to better understand themselves.

Finally, YA literature provides pleasurable reading experiences with interesting material which is at each student's particular reading level. Teachers who provide access to interesting material on a variety of reading levels will usually find that their students do read these books.

Most people who refer to YA literature are including any books being read by adolescents - this label is not limited to literature specifically written for adolescents - but ANY literature they read.

YA literature has become a big business especially with the widespread selling of paperbacks in schools. In Literature For Today's Young Adults , Donelson and Nilsen (1980) relate some of the reasons for this explosion in the selling of paperbacks in the high school setting. One factor mentioned is that during the late 1960s students and teachers turned away from the "classics" and schools began to offer electives and courses in modern literature which included fiction popular with students. Teachers began to read books such as A Hero Ain't Nothin' But A Sandwich (Alice Childress), The Chocolate War (Robert Cormier), or The Outsiders (S.E. Hinton) as common readings with their classes.

By the mid 1960s, authors began to write YA literature which dealt with heretofore taboo subjects such as suicide, sexuality, drugs, and social or racial injustice. YA authors began to write novels with more complex plots and better developed human beings enmeshed in real problems with no easy way out. These books do not preach or wrap life up in nice, easy, unrealistic packages - they deal with life on a realistic level; which is likely the reason students respond to YA literature and YA authors such as Judy Blume, S.E. Hinton or Robert Cormier in such favorable ways.

II. Plan and Implementation

Students learn to become better readers by READING more. Providing students with enjoyable reading opportunities help to change these students into better readers. Additionally, it helps them gain confidence, increases their reading ability and provides experiences needed to enable them to be secure in reading more mature literature in and outside of the classroom.

A plan follows which has been implemented with a degree of success in basic developmental classes and may be utilized with or without modification.

The class should be a one semester course designed for the student to learn basic skills for studying and reading textbooks as well as other reading material. The primary focus of the study skills system should be on developing useful note taking techniques and study procedures. Additionally, the student should learn skills for developing reading comprehension which includes understanding word meanings, identifying controlling ideas, and understanding organizational patterns used in various types of reading material. Further, since research shows that self-selection/self-pacing enhances reading skills and encourages positive attitudes, the student should use the YA novels to show that they can apply previously learned concepts and skills.

Specifically, the students should learn concepts and skills and then apply them to YA novels. The plan might consist of two five-week units stressing reading and study skills and two three-week units utilizing the YA novels to apply learned concepts and skills. For the first five weeks, specified skills may be taught; then a three-week unit using the YA novels to apply previously learned concepts and skills should follow. Additionally, another five-week unit with the remaining specified skills to be taught might follow; and finally, the YA novels could be used the remaining three weeks in which the students could apply all previously learned skills. Such a plan follows:

The First Five-Week Unit

- I. The student will demonstrate an understanding of a study system and be able to:
 - A. Use the organization of a textbook to understand and remember the information in the book
 - B. Examine each of the main parts of a textbook and know the function of each as a study aid
 - C. Understand and apply the SQ4R method of study
 - D. Take textbook notes that will make reviewing and remembering easier
 - E. Take lecture notes from a variety of content area materials
 - F. Skim and scan to understand graphs, charts, diagrams, and tables
- II. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the meaning of words and word parts and will be able to:
 - A. Understand and make use of context clues
 - B. Understand specified prefixes, suffixes, and roots

The First Three-Week Unit

- III. The student will use the YA novel as the basis for applying previously learned concepts and skills and he/she will be able to:
 - A. Select and read a minimum of three YA novels - one to be a common reading
 - B. Write and submit a 4X6 card on all three novels
 - C. Have a book conference on a book of his/her choice

The Second Five-Week Unit

- IV. The student will demonstrate an understanding of basic reading skills and will be able to:
- A. Find the main idea in a single passage
 - B. Find sub-ideas and supporting points that develop main ideas
 - C. Find important unifying or overall controlling ideas in an entire selection in which the writer uses many paragraphs to develop these major points
 - D. Differentiate between literal and interpretative ideas

The Second Three-Week Unit

- V. The student will use the YA novel as the basis for applying all previously learned concepts and skills and he/she will be able to:
- A. Select and read a minimum of three YA novels - one a common reading
 - B. Write and submit a 4X6 card on all three novels
 - C. Have a book conference on a book of his/her choice

The following guidelines may be given to the students to direct them when they report on their books:

GUIDELINES FOR YOUR PAPERBACK

1. Use an index card for recording information from your book.
2. The teacher prefers that the information be typed. However, if you have no access to a typewriter, written work will be accepted.
3. Bibliographic information and a plot summary should be included on the top of the sheet.
4. The following information should be found at the bottom of the sheet:
 - a. Readability level (using Fry or SMOG formula, whichever is appropriate)
 - b. Interest level (expressed in terms of grade level and sex)
 - c. Developmental tasks that are well developed (Havinghurst's Developmental Tasks) (^{Carlson 1967}~~Ley, 1979~~)
 - d. Two significant questions that you might discuss with someone who has read the book
 - e. Theme

III. Conclusion

Since one or even two reading courses are required of most students who enter a university, the reading instructors may encounter many students who have negative attitudes and hate the whole idea of having to take a reading course at the college level. There should be an approach to change such attitudes. Therefore, the use of the YA novel may be used as an important tool for stimulating the motivation to read and for expanding college level students' reading interests.

Basic reading and study skills (main ideas, details, paragraphy relationships, context clues, studying for and taking examinations, and taking notes from books and lectures) are skills that are often taught in isolation. However, the YA novels may be used to achieve not only the cohesiveness of the skills that is desired, but at the same time, inspire in students enjoyment, interest, and the motivation to read and learn for pleasure.

The use of the YA novel has been implemented and utilized. The plan will make allowances for the wide range of reading abilities found in reading classes and positive attitudes should result on the part of the students through the use of the YA literature. Since students' needs and interests are continually changing, an adequate amount of class time and appropriate follow-up activities are provided whereby students are able to select novels which, first of all, they could and want to read and which interest them. For example, a student enjoys reading about the loneliness of someone similar to themselves. They read Island of the Blue Dolphins (Scott O'Dell), Of Mice and Men (John Steinbeck), or Between Friends (Sheila Garrigue). Through individual book conferences (informal and unthreatening conversations) which are

instructional tools to help the students, the teacher may discover a developing interest in a particular problem in which the student is interested. The teacher then refers them to other novels that stimulate interest in understanding people who are similar or different from the student. The book conferences also serve as a means to let the teacher know whether students may apply previously taught concepts and skills and which of these need further emphasizing and reinforcing. The quiet environment, a variety of appealing materials, and classmates experiencing similar privileges are incentives for students to read at a pace that is comfortable to them. A good stock of paperback novels and an efficient cross reference system effectively help students develop and maintain interests in reading.

It should be quite obvious that the YA novel is not the only means of achieving a successful program in reading. However, it is a quite complete subgenre which, if used creatively, can add pizzazz and variety to any program. For it to be very effective, teachers must be well-read and well prepared; and there are many adequate sources which can help. Annotated bibliographies of adolescent novels are frequently organized according to interest areas: Books and the Teenage Reader by G. Robert Carlsen, Your Reading - A Booklist For Junior High Students by Jerry. L. Walker, and High Interest Easy Reading for Junior and Senior High Students by Mariam White are three excellent examples. By using these references, as well as those that are revised and updated by professional journals, a vast source of classroom materials which exhibit endless potential in teaching and stimulating the reluctant and once unsuccessful reader can be built.

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